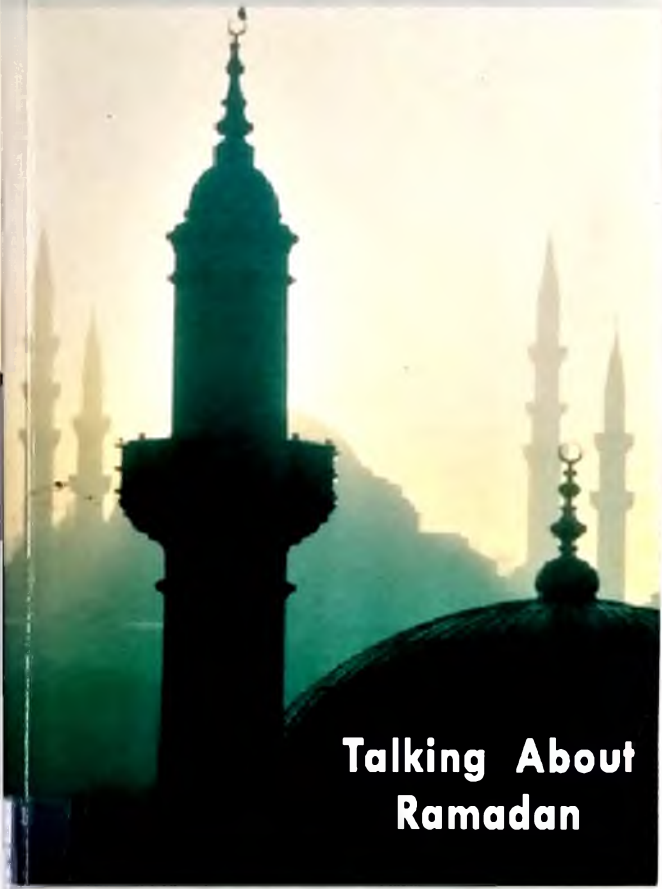
Ask About Islam



Talking About Ramadan

Idris Tawfiq

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

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Published by:
Al-Islah Foundation *for Translation, Publication & Distribution*
Halbouni, Damascus, Syria.
Tel: (+963) 11- 2113721.
Mob: (+963) 933- 919426
Fax: (+963) 11- 8830620
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Deposit No: 210 TAW T

SCH
3/12

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Ramadan

﴿شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ ٱلَّذِىٓ أُنزِلَ فِيهِ ٱلْقُرْءَانُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَٰتٍ مِّنَ ٱلْهُدَىٰ وَٱلْفُرْقَانِ ۚ فَمَن شَهِدَ مِنكُمُ ٱلشَّهْرَ فَلْيَصُمْهُ﴾

[البقرة:185].

Ramadan is the (month) in which was sent down the Qur'an, as a guide to mankind, also clear signs for guidance and judgement (between right and wrong). So every one of you who is present (at his home) during that month should spend it in fasting.

2:185

As darkness begins to fall on the first day of Ramadan, Muslims the world over will be thanking Allah Almighty that they have been able to fast for His sake at the start of this holy month. In the Palestinian refugee camps in Syria and Lebanon, or in the walled-in territory of Gaza itself, Muslims that day will be taking their first sip of water after a day of fasting. From the deserts of Arabia, to the jungles of Indonesia and the skyscrapers of New York and Sydney, Muslims will be breaking their fast in every country on earth on the first day of Ramadan, thanking Allah for all the blessings He has chosen to give them in life.

We take even the simplest things in life for granted, don't we? When we want something to eat we open the refrigerator. When we are thirsty we turn on the tap. Ramadan, though, is a time to remind us all, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, that all

of life's gifts come from God. Even with bombs falling all around them, Muslims can pause for a moment on that first day of Ramadan and see how blessed they really are. Even if their lands are occupied or if they are discriminated against at work or at university, these precious first days of Ramadan provide a chance for ordinary people to put things in perspective. There is neither strength nor power save in Allah, and Ramadan is a time to remember this.

So much more than going without food during daylight hours, Ramadan is at the very heart of Islam and what it means to be Muslim. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) told Muslims that if the right intention is not there, all that our fasting will achieve will be to leave us hungry and thirsty. With the right intention, though, the reward of Ramadan is Paradise itself, *inshallah*. How can you explain that to someone who isn't Muslim?

In Islam there are six central beliefs. Muslims believe in God (Allah), in His Angels, His Messengers, His Books, the Last Judgement and the Divine Knowledge of all things. These sum up the belief of Muslims. In addition to this, though, and perhaps sounding more familiar to those who are not Muslim, there are five Pillars of Islam. In a sense, these "pillars" hold up the whole building. Without them, it would not be possible to live as a Muslim. The Five Pillars are, first of all, declaring belief in Allah and His Prophet, Muhammad; after that, praying five times a day at certain specified times; paying a percentage of one's left over wealth to those who are in need; travelling once in one's life on pilgrimage to Makkah, for those who are able to do so; and fasting each year during the holy month of Ramadan

So Ramadan, then, is not just an added

extra for those who would like to be more pious. It is one of the very pillars which holds up Islam and enables men and women to be Muslims. Far more than just giving up sweets during Lent, the fast is total. Muslims refrain from food and drink and from sexual relations with their partners, between the hours of daylight. To be more precise, the fast begins with the Call to Prayer for the *Fajr* prayer at dawn, and it ends with the Call to Prayer for the *Maghrib* prayer at sunset. During this time Muslims don't smoke, either. Neither do they use bad language or even think bad thoughts, so total is the fast imposed on them.

So why do they fast, then? What is the point of it? Is it a kind of punishment? Is it to show that the things of this world are bad? Is it a way of proving how strong they are? The answer is very simple. Muslims fast during the holy month of Ramadan

because they are commanded to do so by Allah. That is the reason. They do it for His sake and because He wills it. In the holy *Qur'an* they read these verses:

﴿ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ كُتِبَ عَلَيۡكُمُ ٱلصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبۡلِكُمۡ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَتَّقُونَ ١٨٣ ﴾

[البقرة:183]

"O Ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may learn self-restraint."

2:183

Allah commands it to be so. That is the reason for the fast. That is why hundreds of millions of Muslims in every country every year go without food and drink and every other bodily pleasure from daylight to sunset: because Allah has commanded

them to. It is as simple as that.

We can come up with all manner of other reasons to explain the benefits of the fast, and indeed they are many, but Allah alone knows why He willed this as one of the central pillars of Islam. In a world where men and women like to be in control of everything, and like to know the reason for everything before they do it, Islam turns this world's values on its head and says that we can do things simply because our Creator tells us to.

What is perhaps most surprising about Ramadan to those who are not Muslim is the way Muslims look forward to its coming all year. Instead of dreading the arrival of a month of hardship, they long for Ramadan, knowing that it is a time when they will feel close to Allah and closer to their Muslim brothers and sisters all over the world.

How can this be so? Well, Ramadan brings with it so much more than going without food or drink. It is the month, for example, of the holy *Qur'an*. It was during the month of Ramadan that Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) first began to receive revelations from Almighty Allah of His final message for mankind. During Ramadan, then, Muslims recite the *Qur'an* even more than they usually do.

Ramadan, also, is a time for prayer. It is a time when those people who have not been as prompt with their prayers as they might have been, turn once more to Allah and try to recite the five daily prayers. For those who have been faithful to prayer throughout the year, there are additional prayers held during Ramadan. These take place in the mosque after the evening prayer. During the course of the month the whole of the *Qur'an* will have been recited during these special prayers, which are

often packed, even in the smallest of mosques. Mosques vie with one another for the most beautiful voices to recite the *Qur'an* at this time.

And, of course, more than anything else, Ramadan is a time of fasting, for Allah's sake, when Muslims can spare a thought for those whose daily lives are one long fast, not through choice but because they have no food. In thanking Allah for their own good fortune and blessings, Muslims think of these people and try to help them.

In these pages we shall try to look at the inner meaning of Ramadan. Ramadan is one of the most beautiful secrets waiting to be shared. *Inshallah*, whether we are Muslim or not, its meaning can touch our own hearts, too.

Worshipping idols in the heart

﴿قُلْ هُوَ ٱللَّهُ أَحَدٌ ۝١ ٱللَّهُ ٱلصَّمَدُ ۝٢ لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ۝٣ وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُۥ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌۢ ۝٤﴾

[الإخلاص:4]

Say: He is Allah, the One; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten, and there is none like unto Him.

112: 1 - 4

When our beloved Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) finally entered *Makkah* at the head of a Muslim army, he entered the holy *Ka`bah* and destroyed the idols inside, which had been worshiped by the pagans for centuries. In doing so, he put an end, once and for all, to idol worshiping. As Muslims, at least five times a day, we declare that there is no god but Allah. To be precise, we profess that there is no deity, no created being that is worthy of worship except Allah.

Words, though, are very easy to say. We could train a parrot to say as much. In trying to live as good Muslims, submitting our whole lives to the will of Almighty Allah, we should always strive to mean with our whole heart what we say with our lips. And therein lies the problem. How many of us really submit every fibre of our being to Allah's will? How many of us find our total happiness with Him alone? How

many of us have destroyed all the idols in our lives that keep us from living as good Muslims?

On the contrary, don't we always find excuses for not praying as soon as we hear the *Adhan*? As we have said before, we can spend four or five hours in one evening watching silly programmes on the television and we can spend ages talking about nothing on the telephone, and yet we can hardly find three or four minutes to pray. Maybe this is because what is most important to us is perhaps not Allah at all. Maybe there are idols, deep within our hearts, which we still cling to, which we still refuse to smash, and which keep us from being the Muslims we want to be.

More than any other time, Ramadan is the time for us to return to Allah. It is like one great Spring Cleaning of our spiritual houses, when we throw out all the rubbish

our hearts have clung to over the last year and turn, instead, to Allah alone. It is a great gift to be offered such a chance. Many in the world would love to be offered such a chance to set their lives in order. We should try each year, in Ramadan, to make the most of it.

Think of any funeral you have been to. After the funeral service prayers are all finished and after listening to the *Qur'an*, someone might get up to say a few words about the person who has died. His family and friends would certainly talk about him as they sit together. But no one will stand up and say how many pairs of shoes he had. On such an occasion, no one will say that the man had a good job and a big car or that he used to have two holidays a year. They might say that he was a good husband, a loyal friend, or a devoted father to his children. They might talk about what a good Muslim he had been, how he had

been faithful to prayer and generous to the poor.

In other words, in death, we come face to face with what was really important to us in life. All the wealth that people have cannot save them. All the things they consider so important in life, such as football, gardening, or even having a good reputation, cannot prevent people going to the grave.

In fact, more than this, many of these things which we cling to in this life can actually take us away from Allah. They can even keep us away from the people we love most of all. If we save and hoard money to such an extent that we are not spending money on our family, hasn't money then become an idol? If working so hard at the office means that we have no time to spend with our spouses and children, hasn't work then become an idol? If our love for football or certain television

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programmes is so important to us that we regularly have to delay our prayers or can't find the time to help our children with their homework, then hasn't that too become an idol?

Idols of gold or silver may not be the greatest threat to modern-day New York or Paris, and there are not many of us who display wooden or stone statues in our homes and are prepared to worship them. We would all agree that this is *haram*. Muslims don't believe in or worship statues. All of us would loudly proclaim that idol worship is the worst possible sin because it denies the oneness of Almighty Allah. And yet, actions speak louder than words. Our children more readily copy what we do than what we say. Deep down in our hearts, we all know what is most important to us. Sometimes, we can't even concentrate for a few moments on our prayers without thinking of something else.

The Children of Israel, having been led out of Egypt by Prophet Musa (peace be upon him) were quick to fall back to their old ways. Even though Almighty Allah had led and guided them, they chose to backslide and to bow down to what they had once worshiped. Life is sometimes easier that way, isn't it? It is sometimes a lot easier to settle for second best, for those things that pull us down, rather than to strive each day in the cause of Allah.

Life puts a lot of rubbish on our shoulders. We sometimes spend our whole lives struggling with the weight of this baggage and never manage to break free of it. The idols in our hearts are like this, they drag us down, destroying our real humanity, which is given to us by Allah alone. The idols that seem to please us and bring us fleeting happiness cannot answer the deepest need of our heart - the need for Allah alone.

When we hear the *Adhan*, that sweet cry which summons us to the worship of one God, blessed be He, we are encouraged as Muslims not only to repeat the words of that call, but also to say "*La hawla wa la quwat illa billah*" (there is neither strength nor power save in Allah). Idols of gold and silver or of wood and of stone cannot save us. Nor can the deceptions which lurk within us, whispering to us to turn away. Allah alone is our strength.

If we constantly remind ourselves of that fact, not only in Ramadan but throughout the course of the year, we can avoid the dangers of *shirk*. By immersing ourselves in knowledge of the *Qur'an* and in the life and example of our beloved Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), we can steer our lives in the right direction and find the joy and the peace that Islam alone can bring. It is for this reason that Almighty Allah tells us:

﴿قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ ٱلنَّاسِ ۝١ مَلِكِ ٱلنَّاسِ ۝٢ إِلَٰهِ ٱلنَّاسِ ۝٣ مِن شَرِّ ٱلْوَسْوَاسِ ٱلْخَنَّاسِ ۝٤ ٱلَّذِى يُوَسْوِسُ فِى صُدُورِ ٱلنَّاسِ ۝٥ مِنَ ٱلْجِنَّةِ وَٱلنَّاسِ ۝٦﴾

[الناس: 1-6]

Say: I seek refuge with the Lord and Cherisher of Mankind, the King (or Ruler) of Mankind, the God (or Judge) of Mankind, - from the Mischief of the Whisperer (of Evil) who withdraws (after his whisper), - who whispers into the hearts of Mankind, among Jinns and among Men.

114:1-6

Ramadan's very worst enemy

﴿ مَآ أَصَابَكَ مِنْ حَسَنَةٍ فَمِنَ ٱللَّهِ ۖ وَمَآ أَصَابَكَ مِن سَيِّئَةٍ فَمِن نَّفْسِكَ ۚ وَأَرْسَلْنَٰكَ لِلنَّاسِ رَسُولًا ۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ شَهِيدًا ﴿٧٩﴾ ﴾

[النساء:79].

Whatever good, (O Man) happens to thee, is from Allah; but whatever evil happens to thee, is from thyself and We have sent thee as a Messenger to instruct mankind and enough is Allah for a witness.

4:79

It's true, isn't it? You can fool a lot of people for a lot of the time. You can even fool yourself for a while. But Allah cannot be fooled. No matter how much we pretend, we cannot deceive the One Who created us. Allah knows every leaf that falls from every tree and He counts every hair on our head. Others may see us as ever so pious, so kind, so caring. "What a good Muslim," they say. But we know the truth. We know the jealousy that drives us on, or the laziness that prevents us from doing what we know to be right. We know the backbiting and the bad thoughts. Allah Almighty knows all this too, and more, and yet He still wishes well for us, still calls us towards Him.

As we have seen already, in the very last chapter of the holy *Qur'an* we read the following verses in *Surat An-Nas*:

﴿قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ ٱلنَّاسِ ۝١ مَلِكِ ٱلنَّاسِ ۝٢ إِلَٰهِ ٱلنَّاسِ

۝٣ مِن شَرِّ ٱلْوَسْوَاسِ ٱلْخَنَّاسِ ۝٤ ٱلَّذِى يُوَسْوِسُ فِى صُدُورِ ٱلنَّاسِ ۝٥ مِنَ ٱلْجِنَّةِ وَٱلنَّاسِ ۝٦﴾

[الناس: 1- 6]

Say: I seek refuge with the Lord and Cherisher of mankind, the King (or Ruler) of mankind, the God (or Judge) of mankind, from the mischief of the Whisperer (of evil), who withdraws (after his whisper), the same who whispers into the hearts of mankind, among Jinns and among Men.

114:1-6

Perhaps it is not all that surprising that this is the very last *surah* of the *Qur'an*. After we have listened to the entire Revelation to mankind, with a complete history of Islam since the beginning of time, and words of encouragement, advice,

and warning for every situation in life, Almighty Allah concludes His Book with a warning. He warns us to beware of the Whisperer, the Devil, the *shaytan*. Listening to him can bring the whole house falling down upon us. Following his whispers can destroy all the good we do. And there is nothing more certain to ruin Ramadan for us than to listen to him.

Allah calls us onward towards Him and upward as we strive in virtue and goodness. He is forever forgiving us and pardoning our sins, giving us chance upon chance to become better Muslims. The *shaytan*, on the other hand, always does the opposite. He tells us we are rubbish, and that we will never be good Muslims because we are bad. He tells us that all our fasting and good deeds in Ramadan is a waste of time, since we will just go back to our bad ways once the holy month is over. He makes us depressed, when we have

nothing to be depressed about. He makes us doubt even the good we do, making us think after the event that we did it for selfish reasons.

And it is precisely the way in which he does it that makes it so subtle. He "whispers" to us when we are alone. He whispers to us, urging us to do evil. He whispers to us to stay just five minutes more in bed, so that we go off to sleep again and miss the Dawn Prayer. He whispers to us to doubt our friends or to lie to our family. He whispers to us to talk to others of the opposite sex, since nothing will come of it, it is just a harmless conversation. He whispers to us to cheat and to steal. He whispers to us that, so long as no one is looking, we can take that sip of water or that morsel of food. The *shaytan* is truly our very worst enemy. There is nothing more certain to destroy our good intentions in Ramadan than to listen to his whisperings.

Tackling an enemy we can see is much easier. We know what he looks like and we can find ways of combating him. Like soldiers, we can prepare to fight an enemy we can see. Taking on an enemy we can't see is much more difficult. And the *shaytan* is so clever. He uses the very things that are our weakest points. If Allah has gifted us with good looks, we feel pride and vanity about how good looking we are and we use those good looks for bad purposes, attracting others to think or even do bad things. If we have been given the gift of intelligence, we use it to trumpet how clever we are. If we are strong, we use that strength to harm others.

The *shaytan* not only whispers to us, urging us to be slow in doing good and to be quick to do wrong, but he also tells lies. He tells us we are no good, that we will never achieve the lofty goals of Islam, so why bother at all. He tells us that we are

ugly, that we are fat, that we are stupid, that no one likes us. He makes us question every good thing we do.

And there is more. He not only secretly whispers directly into our hearts, but he also uses others to do the whispering. Our best friends tempt us to do wrong. It doesn't seem too bad coming from them, when they tell us to stay in the shopping mall for just half an hour more and catch the Afternoon Prayer later on. We seem to be comforted when friends tell us we can stay out just that bit longer, even though parents have told us to be back at a certain time and are sure to be worrying when we don't arrive. They tell us to mix with the wrong type of people, to listen to the worst kind of music, or to try things "just for once," even though they are *haram*.

The *shaytan* really is our very worst enemy. He even lies to non-Muslims,

telling them that Islam is the religion of evil and violence.

But let us not forget that Allah is in control of all things. It is when we forget this that we become prone to the whisperings of the *shaytan*. Allah created the heavens and the earth and everything that is in between them. There is nothing that can resist His power. Let us never forget, though, that as long as we entrust all that we do to Allah's power and protection, there is nothing that can harm us. As Muslims, we begin our conversations "in the name of Allah, Most Merciful, Most Compassionate." We begin all our endeavors "if Allah wills it to be so." And when we feel the need for help, we cry out "I take refuge in Allah from the accursed *shaytan*."

Islam is so sensible and practical. Allah presents us with no difficulty that we don't

have the resources to overcome. He tests no soul beyond its capacity. Being aware that the *shaytan* is no more than a talker, a whisperer, is halfway to defeating him. By being faithful to prayer and to the traditions of our beloved Prophet (may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), we learn to overcome the whispering. By associating with good friends and by listening to the advice of wise people, we become strong in combating our own weakness. Don't forget that one of the lessons we learn in Ramadan is that we learn to subdue the body and subject it to our will. The body cannot control us. Connecting with Allah is the way to become truly strong. And when we are close to Allah, there is nothing that can overcome us. Not even Ramadan's very worst enemy.

The Night of Power

﴿إِنَّآ أَنزَلْنَٰهُ فِى لَيْلَةٍ مُّبَٰرَكَةٍ ۚ إِنَّا كُنَّا مُنذِرِينَ ﴿٣﴾ فِيهَا يُفْرَقُ
كُلُّ أَمْرٍ حَكِيمٍ ﴿٤﴾ أَمْرًا مِّنْ عِندِنَآ ۚ إِنَّا كُنَّا مُرْسِلِينَ ﴿٥﴾ رَحْمَةً
مِّن رَّبِّكَ ۚ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلسَّمِيعُ ٱلْعَلِيمُ ﴿٦﴾﴾

[الدخان:6]

By the Book that makes things clear: We sent it down during a blessed night. For we ever wish to warn against evil. In that night is made distinct every affair of wisdom, by command, from Us, For we ever send revelations, as a Mercy from thy Lord; for He hears and knows all things.

44:3-6

There falls during the last ten days of Ramadan the most beautiful night of the year. Known to Muslims as *Laylat Al-Qadr*, the Night of Power, this night is the night on which the first verses of the holy *Qur'an* were first revealed to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). It is on this night, too, that Almighty Allah reveals to the angels all that He has decreed for the coming year. A Muslim's worship and good deeds on this night receive the reward from Allah of doing the same prayers and good deeds a thousand times over on other nights. And on this night the angels descend, bringing peace.

Just to read the verses from *Surah* 97 of the holy *Qur'an* is enough to make a Muslim shudder in awe at their meaning. *Surah* 97 is called *Surat Al-Qadr*, or the Night of Power:

إِنَّا أَنزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ ۝١ وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ ۝٢

لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ ۝٣ تَنَزَّلُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِم مِّن كُلِّ أَمْرٍ ۝٤ سَلَامٌ هِيَ حَتَّىٰ مَطْلَعِ الْفَجْرِ ۝٥

[القدر: 1-5]

We have indeed revealed this message in the Night of power: And what will explain to thee what the Night of Power is? The Night of Power is better than a thousand months. Therein come down the angels and the Spirit by Allah's permission, on every errand. All peace is that night until the dawn.

97:1-5

The wonderful Night of Power, then, commemorates first of all that night on which the Prophethood of Muhammad (pbuh) began, as he received from the angel Jibreel (Gabriel) those first immortal

verses from the Holy *Qur'an*, asking him to read, or recite. Muhammad (pbuh) was an unlettered man, unable to read or write, and he told the angel that he could not do so. Muhammad (pbuh) revealed later that it was as if Jibreel had squeezed his chest until he could almost not breathe, when he received the revelation. It seems to us now as though the whole of Creation must have been waiting with baited breath for Muhammad's response to the angel. The rest is history. Muhammad (pbuh) accepted Almighty Allah's Will and so began His final revelation to mankind, which was to take over twenty-three years to complete. Muhammad (pbuh) was to become the final Messenger of Allah to mankind, confirming all that had gone before and becoming the Seal of the Prophets.

During Ramadan every Muslim "seeks" the Night of Power, even though its exact date is kept concealed, for whatever reason

Allah has chosen. Muhammad (pbuh) tells Muslims to "seek it on the odd nights of the last ten days of Ramadan." Those who are serious, then, will look for this special night. Muhammad (pbuh) also tells us that "He who spends the night in prayer on the Night of Power, as a sign of his faith, and seeking rewards from Allah, his previous sins will be forgiven."

Laylat Al-Qadr is a special gift from Allah to the Muslim community. On this night He directs His Mercy and reveals to the angels what He has decreed for the coming year. Muslims believe that he does not decree these things on the Night of Power, since all things have been decreed according to His will since the beginning of time, but He announces what He has decreed to the angels, who record it for all time. On this night, too, the prayers and supplications of the faithful are granted, and large numbers who repent are forgiven

their sins. It is on this night, too, that the angels descend to the earth with all sorts of errands from their Creator.

How could we be so lukewarm in our faith to neglect the importance of this night? How could we just turn off the television and go to our beds on this night, knowing that the angels are descending to the earth with the gift of Peace for all mankind and that they are ready to listen to us and to pray for us and to help us in our lives as Muslims? How could our faith be so weak that we prefer to sleep than to have all our past sins forgiven?

But this is what we do. The serious, on the other hand, spend whole nights in prayer. Some even isolate themselves in the mosque for the whole last ten days of Ramadan, praying and begging Allah's Mercy for themselves and for those they love. Muslims call this seclusion or retreat

in the mosque, *itikaf*. Those who spend the whole of the last ten days know that when they pray on each of the odd nights during this time they are sure to be praying on the Night of Power on at least one of them. Others choose to retreat into the mosque for just one of the nights, hoping that this night will be the Night of Power.

Others do nothing. They just go to bed and snore.

Laylat Al-Qadr is a night of Power because on this night the amount of reward gained for worship is equivalent to a thousand months. In fact, the Holy *Qur'an* tells us that this night is "better than a thousand months." It is a night of Power because the angels bring down peace to a world thirsting for peace and to men and women whose hearts long for peace like a deer thirsts for running water.

Every year many people take a vacation from work. They have worked hard, so they take a few days or a week to go on holiday or at least to spend some days in relaxation. Many people who have an important interview or an exam will take a day off to prepare for it. Others take a day off work from time to time to go shopping with their friends. How much more beneficial it would be for us to take a vacation during these last ten days of Ramadan so that we could spend whole nights in prayer. Better than any job interview or exam, and certainly better than going shopping, we would reap the promised rewards of forgiveness.

Propeht Muhammad's (pbuh) wife, Aishah (may Allah be pleased with her) asked Muhammad (pbuh) what we should say when we pray on this special night. He told her to say, " O Allah, You are

pardoning and you love to pardon, so pardon me."

What greater prayer could we ask for in Ramadan than that?

Prophet Muhammad:
the best example for us today

﴿مَّا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَآ أَحَدٍ مِّن رِّجَالِكُمْ وَلَٰكِن رَّسُولَ ٱللَّهِ وَخَاتَمَ ٱلنَّبِيِّـۧنَ ۗ وَكَانَ ٱللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَىْءٍ عَلِيمًا ﴿٤٠﴾﴾

[الأحزاب:40].

Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the Messenger of Allah, and the Seal of the Prophets, and Allah has full knowledge of all things.

33:40

Young people today see a lot of pomp and ceremony when it comes to politicians

and leaders. It seems as though the more authority you have, the more the red carpet is laid out, the more special attire and finery you are expected to wear, and the more freedom you have to express your opinions — whether they are held up by evidence or not, and no matter how much they may offend others.

But this Ramadan, as well as re-dedicating ourselves to prayer and to reciting the holy *Qur'an* and fasting for Allah's sake, let's take a look at the final Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and see the stark difference between what is now and what was before. We won't find any red carpets in that life. In studying Muhammad's life (pbuh) we find a model for our own.

"Which one is Muhammad?" So humble was the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) that strangers

looking for him in the mosque in Madinah had to ask this. Sitting in the row of believers for the daily prayers, Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), with his simple and modest bearing, could not be distinguished from anyone else.

He was so calm, so dignified, and so peaceful that no one could single him out as the leader. Children and youths would approach him to receive a warm greeting or to ask this great, yet humble, man a question or some advice. In quiet prayer he looked like any other simple man. There was no sign here of the great warrior, the skillful negotiator in times of war and peace, the statesman. There was no sign either that this was the man, from among all men, who was chosen to receive the Creator's final message to mankind.

In the mosque his focus was on Allah alone. He was like every Muslim who

enters the mosque to pray. And yet, unlike any other Muslim, he had been chosen as the Seal of the Prophets, the most honorable and the noblest of men. He was the one whom Allah selected to guide all mankind.

Orphaned by the age of six and born in a relatively unimportant region of the world to a simple family, Muhammad (pbuh) could neither read nor write. When commanded by the Angel Jibreel to recite the first glorious verses of the *Qur'an*, Muhammad (pbuh) could only respond that he was unable to read or recite them.

Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) had neither power nor wealth. He possessed none of the things that the world considers important. Yet Allah chose him from all men in the world to be what the *Qur'an* calls "a mercy to mankind."

This is the role that all Muslims should take on in this world that is so full of turmoil and hate. Muslims are the standard-bearers of the message of Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) and it is a message of mercy. This Ramadan let us re-dedicate ourselves to telling the world about this message of mercy and about the one (pbuh) who brought it.

In his person, the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) was a mercy to all the people on earth. One so kind, so pious, so devout in prayer and obedience to the will of Allah had been chosen as the guide for mankind.

We should ask ourselves, not only in Ramadan but all the time, how closely are we living our lives according to the message of Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him)? If we are living in

his way, no problem will be too great to overcome, our future will appear clear before us, and the challenges of being Muslim will seem small. If all Muslims join in the ranks of the followers of Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), they will be joining the ranks of the merciful, pious, and just people through all the ages, from the beginning of time. Indeed, Allah opens the way for those who sincerely obey Him and His Messenger.

Good people should surround themselves with good friends. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) was surrounded by people who sought the pleasure of Allah. This Ramadan, ask yourself another question: Who do you mix with and why? Your friends reflect who you are.

At the end of his life, when Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was laid to rest in the earth, his

funeral was attended by his heartbroken friends and Companions. They had been with him for so long, many since the time of the first revelation of the *Qur'an* some twenty-three years before, and now they were to be left alone, without a guide for the first time in so many years.

Imagine yourself living at the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him); imagine walking in his blessed footsteps. If you follow his *Sunnah*, you are walking in his footsteps today.

His body was not laid to rest in some grand tomb as one might expect for so important and so influential a man. Rather it was placed in the earth beneath the spot where he used to sleep on a simple mat. It fell upon Abu Bakr (Allah be pleased with him), his friend from before the time of the first revelation, to deliver the funeral sermon. Abu Bakr had to try to make sense

out of this tragedy for the crowds assembled before him. At this key moment in the development of Islam, they eagerly awaited what Abu Bakr, the closest friend of the Prophet (pbuh), would have to say. His words to them were filled with wisdom. "O men," he said, "if anyone worships Muhammad, let him know that Muhammad is dead. But if anyone worships Allah, then know that Allah is alive and will never die."

Abu Bakr (May Allah be pleased with him) told the Muslim faithful that Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was the greatest man to have lived but he was not the Lord of all creation. He was a man like all men. And this is what makes Islam so extraordinary. There are now nearly two billion Muslims in the world, and we are attentive to what our beloved Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said or did. Each one of us

proclaims at least five times a day that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is the Messenger of Allah. It is the core of our faith. In the same breath in which we declare belief in the One true Lord of mankind and all that exists, we declare belief in His Messenger.

The love and reverence which we have for Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) is both real and deep. We see him as the gentlest, the kindest, and the sweetest of men, and yet he remains for us precisely that: a man. Neither a god nor a saint. We do not ascribe to our Prophet magical powers. It would be a blasphemy for us to do so. We see him as a simple man, chosen from among men, with the same cares and worries as all of us.

But in Prophet Muhammad (peace and

blessings be upon him) we see that it is possible for us to dedicate all our lives to Allah and to live under His guidance, yet live in the midst of life. Not divine, but human like us, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) shows us by his life and example that Islam is the perfect way of life and that it is possible to achieve happiness by following this way. This is why in Ramadan we know that our fasting and our prayers have an effect on our lives and the lives of those around us.

If you find your life is taking you in another direction, stop and think. Don't make decisions on the spur of the moment that will take you on a different path that heads away from that of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him).

In Islam there are no priests or popes. That, perhaps, is the secret of Islam. There is no special knowledge reserved for a

professional religious class. There are no go-betweens between the Creator and the created. We do have scholars who have devoted their lives to becoming closer to understand Allah's Will, but these scholars are men like us. Islam is ours for the taking. How many of us reach out and take what Islam has to offer? How many of us are shining examples of the mercy and justice that Islam can develop in us?

Each of us can fall prostrate before our Maker and say what we need to say without the help of anyone else. Just you and your creator! We can see this clearly inside any mosque. Muslim men and women, each in their own place, gather in the mosque for the five daily prayers. They pray together as a community, in congregation, receiving blessings for doing so, yet it is obvious to anyone who looks on that each Muslim is concerned with speaking to his or her Lord individually. It

is perhaps this, more than anything else, that makes the place of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) so strong in the heart of every Muslim.

Muhammad (pbuh) was a man and he found it possible, with Allah's help, to live out every requirement of Islam. So you and I, then, can try to do the same and, with Allah's help, we can live out our faith like our beloved Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). During Ramadan let us all resolve to study his life and sayings (pbuh) and, instead of just talking about them, put them into action in our own lives.

Where has all the mercy gone?

﴿ قُلْ يَٰعِبَادِيَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَسْرَفُوا۟ عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِهِمْ لَا تَقْنَطُوا۟ مِن رَّحْمَةِ ٱللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَغْفِرُ ٱلذُّنُوبَ جَمِيعًا ۚ إِنَّهُۥ هُوَ ٱلْغَفُورُ ٱلرَّحِيمُ ﴿٥٣﴾ ﴾

[الزُّمَر: 53].

Say: O my servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah; For Allah forgives all sins: For He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

39:53

It was the handcuffs that attracted people's attention. I don't know what the three of them had done, but being handcuffed to each other in a crowded tramcar was what attracted the gaze of every single passenger. You could almost feel the condemnation that was directed towards the three men. "I wonder what they have done," you could imagine people thinking.

Whatever they had done, the tramcar was full and I ended up standing next to the three of them. "*Asalaamu alaykum*," I said. You could feel the weight being lifted off their shoulders by those words. Imagine being stared at by everyone, let alone not knowing where you were being taken to or what lay in store for you. We talked about nothing in particular for a minute or two, and then I had to get off at my stop. "*Asalaamu alaykum*" again and the encounter was over.

I am not interested in what the three men had done. Maybe they had robbed a bank or deserted from the army. Who knows? Whatever crime they had committed, justice should take its course and they should take responsibility for their deeds. It should end there, though, shouldn't it? Being punished for a crime should be the end of having committed one. But as human beings we often don't let it end there. In the case of these particular three, they were being judged by everyone on the tram without knowing a single thing about them. All of them were condemned because of their handcuffs. Each passenger was both judge and jury

We are always told, aren't we, never to judge a book by its cover. Yet if any of us goes into a bookshop it is not the dull-looking books which first attract our attention. We dismiss those as uninteresting. It is the glossy books, with

lots of photographs that we go for first. We are exactly the same with people. First impressions are what we always go by. Glamour, power and influence in people are what attract us most, rather than the integrity of their lives. People who are poor or not very clever or disabled are discarded from our thoughts.

If that was not bad enough, we go even further. We make judgements about people by the way they look or by the positions they hold in society. Admit it. That is what we do. We rarely hold out a hand of greeting to someone who is dirty and unwashed. We would not even think of giving up a seat on the train for someone dressed in rags. Our behavior, though, is even more subtle. People serve us in a café and we take our meal without even looking at them. Someone fills our car with gasoline and we don't say a word in taking the change.

Ramadan is a time when we give thought to the way we are speaking and behaving. It is a time to examine our motives and intentions, trying to purify them and bring them closer to what Allah wants.

As Muslims, every action we make and every sentence we utter should begin with the words *Bismillah ar Rahman ar Rahim*, "In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate." Some of us even do say this. Allah is the Most Merciful. He shows His mercy to us every single day just by listening to our feeble prayers. The Maker of the heavens and the earth and everything in between, turns His face to us and listens to the prayers of sinful, ungrateful creatures. In response to His goodness, we turn away time and time again, often only going back to the throne of Mercy when we want something. Allah is so Merciful that he overlooks our faults

and pours blessings upon us at every opportunity.

As Muslims we, too, should be merciful. We should be the most merciful nation. Punishing people for doing wrong does not mean that we cannot show respect and kindness towards them. And there is yet more. We punish people whether they have done any wrong or not, simply by the way we treat them. Think of the harsh way we sometimes speak to our wives or children. Think of the unkind words we use even to our closest friends.

In this life we have all been given different things to do. Some are kings and some are paupers. All of us should thank Almighty Allah for what we have, since we are simply stewards in this world of His gifts. How, then, can we be so cruel to others? How can we speak harsh and unkind words to others because their

station in life is, at the moment, less than ours? How can we judge people so heartlessly without knowing anything about them?

We stand next to someone in the mosque for Friday prayers. At the end of the prayers we even offer them "Peace," but once outside the door we often don't give them the time of day or return their greeting in the street.

Where has the all the mercy gone? Surely, when our foreheads are touching the ground in prayer we realise that we are nothing and that what little we have comes by Allah's grace. Who do we think we are that we can treat other people as less than us? The cemetery is full of important and indispensable people. Those who thought they were so important in this world had to travel down to the grave with those who had nothing.

What makes us truly important in this world is the goodness of our lives. Driving a big, fancy car or having lots of shoes in the wardrobe will not avoid our journey to the grave. Once we are gone, people will not mention how many holidays a year we took or what job we had. They will mention that we were good fathers, husbands, wives and daughters. They will say, if they can, that we were faithful to prayer and that we were kind to the poor.

We read in the holy *Qur'an*:

﴿يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقۡنَٰكُم مِّن ذَكَرٖ وَأُنثَىٰ وَجَعَلۡنَٰكُمۡ شُعُوبٗا وَقَبَآئِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوٓاْۚ إِنَّ أَكۡرَمَكُمۡ عِندَ ٱللَّهِ أَتۡقَىٰكُمۡۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٞ ١٣﴾

[الحُجُرات:13]

"O mankind! We created you from a single soul, male and female, and made

you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other. Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the greatest of you in piety. Allah is All-knowing, All-aware."

49:13

As Muslims, let us thank Almighty Allah each day of Ramadan and every day for the rest of the year for the gifts He showers upon us, being grateful for even the least cup of water which comes from His bounty.

As for those three men on the tram, we can punish them for their crimes, if that is appropriate, but we can also begin by treating them as fellow human beings. Let us greet each one of our brothers and sisters, regardless of their position or social standing, with *Asalaamu alaykum wa*

Rahmatullahi wa Barakatu, 'May the peace and the blessings and the *Mercy* of Allah be upon you." Maybe in that way, the All-Merciful will one day be merciful to us, *inshallah*.

Prayer is better than sleep

﴿وَإِذَا رَأَوْا تِجَارَةً أَوْ لَهْوًا انفَضُّوا إِلَيْهَا وَتَرَكُوكَ قَائِمًا ۚ قُلْ مَا عِندَ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ مِّنَ اللَّهْوِ وَمِنَ التِّجَارَةِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ ﴿١١﴾﴾

[الجمعة:11].

But when they see some bargain or some pastime, they disperse headlong to it, and leave thee standing. Say: That which Allah has is better than any pastime or bargain! And Allah is the Best to provide (for all needs).

62:11

When young Muslims meet others for the first time and find out that they are Muslim, often one of the very first questions they ask each other is, "Do you pray?" It's as if this is their touchstone to see if the person they have met is a real Muslim or not. Calling yourself Muslim is one thing, being a Muslim is something else. We all know deep down, don't we, that praying five times a day is at the heart of Islam? It is one of the things that distinguishes a Muslim from everyone else in the world; that all the activities of life can be made significant by the cycle of prayer and praise which we offer to Almighty Allah. So why, then, do we have such a problem being faithful to prayer?

The holy month of Ramadan is a month of fasting. It is the special time of the Holy *Qur'an*. But Ramadan is also the month of prayer. It is the time when those who have not been all that faithful to their duty to

prayer, can come back. It is a time for all of us to deepen our own life of prayer and so strengthen us for the year ahead.

When I first performed *Umrah*, the lesser pilgrimage, it was one of the most important experiences of my life and it is still having its effects on me now. Being so close to the *Ka`bah* was a deeply moving experience. Being at the very place where our beloved Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), like all the prophets before him, had walked and prayed, was amazing.

One of the things that struck me most about being in Makkah, amongst so many others, was when the Call to Prayer sounded for *Fajr*, the Dawn Prayer, thousands of people appeared from every direction and headed towards the *Ka`bah* for prayer. Getting up in the middle of the night wasn't difficult at all, because the experience of praying at the *Ka`bah* was so

moving. At the time, moving with the vast crowd, I couldn't help thinking about what it is usually like back home. Those getting up and going to the mosque for the Dawn Prayer are certainly a minority, aren't they? Away from Makkah, it is all too easy to ignore the *Adhan* completely and stay in the comfort of one's bed.

At special times like Ramadan, or when we go on pilgrimage, it seems so much easier to be faithful to prayer and to take Islam so much more seriously. How many of us, for example, have attended *Tarawiyah* Prayers in the mosque during Ramadan, even though we might occasionally have missed one or two of the obligatory prayers during the rest of the year? It's one of life's paradoxes that we want so much to be good, and yet we find ourselves falling into the same old traps and doing things we later regret.

How odd we are as human beings! We can quite happily sit in front of the television for hours or sit idly chatting on the Net to no one in particular, yet we can't manage to set aside ten minutes to pray. We do pray, of course, when we want something. Prayer is no problem for us at all then. It comes quite naturally and is no inconvenience at all. The minute a plane begins to plummet to the ground because of engine failure, even the least religious person on board raises his hands in prayer. When a loved one is diagnosed with a serious illness or when we desperately want an interview to go well, we pray.

The very words of the *Adhan* call us to prayer and to security. There is no greater security than knowing that we are in the presence of Allah, Who controls all things. We fret so much and we waste so much time worrying about what might happen, when Allah is guiding everything and we

have nothing to fear. How beautiful it is, for example, to get up in the middle of the night, when all is still and calm, and to prostrate ourselves in prayer before the Maker of the Heavens and the Earth. No one else is around and we can be completely ourselves before Him, pouring out our hearts, asking, begging, and thanking.

If we want something from a friend, we have to couch our request with explanations: "Can I borrow such and such because..." With Allah we need no explanations. He knows more about what we need than we know ourselves. All we need to do is to bow down in prayer. The very movement of the prayers is relaxing to our bodies and it helps us to put our lives into the proper context. In the presence of such greatness, life is very fragile.

For Muslims, the Call to Prayer is like an air raid siren. In times of war or danger, an air raid siren will sound to tell the citizens to run and take cover. No one thinks twice about doing so. The siren sounds and you run as fast as your legs can carry you to a place of safety. The *Adhan* is just the same, but it is calling us to escape, not from bombs falling from the sky, but from the everyday concerns and worries of life which often threaten to crush us. It calls us, instead, to take shelter in Allah alone, Who knows us and cares for us and Who wants the best for us. How quickly we should rush to prayer, taking refuge in Allah. How quickly we should leave the inconsequential things of life and turn in prayer to life's Creator.

We have all seen old people in the mosque and been deeply touched by this old man or that old lady who spends so much time in prayer. Praying has made a

difference to them. It is very moving, too, to see a man come into the mosque from the street, straight from his work which is both back breaking and hard, and to see him prostrate himself in prayer, praying, perhaps, for his children or for the money he needs just to make ends meet. With our foreheads touching the ground, we are all equal. There is no pretending when we pray.

We are truly blessed as Muslims. Allah has given us everything we need to live a good life, which will bring us happiness. The five pillars of Islam guide us to Paradise. The five daily prayers are a way of giving meaning to our lives and of setting aside just a few minutes each day to return thanks for all we have. Every Ramadan we make lots of resolutions about how we are going to improve. The greatest resolution of all is to be faithful to prayer. All our talk about Muslims and

about Islam is worthless if we don't ground it in prayer. Being faithful to the five daily prayers changes us for the better. Better than watching TV, better than chatting on the Internet, prayer on a regular basis re-charges our spiritual batteries and makes us feel good. What's more, regular prayer makes us better people, better Muslims, since its effects stay with us for the rest of the day. In the words of the *Adhan* which call us to get out of bed and to pray *Fajr*, the Dawn Prayer, "Prayer is better than sleep."

An answer

for a young Muslim

Is everything forbidden in Islam?

Asalaamu alaykum. **I'm finding difficulty in understanding the basics of Islam. Firstly, which sects are correct? There is so much difference in their beliefs, e.g Hanafi, Salafi - what are all these? Basic things such as watching movies, listening to songs, going to cinemas, watching comedy, cracking**

jokes etc.... All these things I have mentioned are prohibited according to Islam, if I am correct? All these concerns make me feel that following Islam will make one a loner and more miserable. Everyone needs some kind of entertainment. I don't mean to insult Islam, it's just that these things really bother me. Ultimately, why all these regulations?

Asalaamu alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatu. Thank you very much for your question. Contrary to what you seem to think, Islam is anything but dull and it is so simple to understand. Unfortunately, though, we often complicate things so much that ordinary people find them difficult to understand. As Muslims, we sometimes give a very poor image of what Islam is really like by the way we behave. Your question fits very nicely into this

book, because answering it gives a chance to speak about the real Islam which Muslims strive towards in Ramadan.

When I first started at the Islamic Institute where I teach, I spent the first few weeks of the term wondering why everyone looked so miserable! No one seemed to offer "*Asalaamu alaykum*" to you unless they knew you, and everyone looked so serious all the time. I told my students that the most important rule in my class was that they should smile! And do you know, just by saying that, many of them began to look less serious around the corridors and even began to greet strangers with the Muslim greeting of peace. It seems as though many of them had this idea at the back of their minds that Islamic scholars should not laugh, although none of them could actually say where such an

idea came from. In such a mindset, anything that is fun is wrong. But such a mindset has no basis in Islam.

The Islamic scholars from long ago, when Islamic knowledge was highly valued and was the basis of life, traveled throughout the world calling people to Islam and continuing the search for knowledge. From this situation eminent scholars emerged who answered the complex questions and issues of their place and time. The four schools you refer to were the most prominent, but they held each other in the greatest respect, since each of their opinions is acceptable within Islam. The whole point of their study was to help people to follow Allah more closely. The rules they made were not rules just for the sake of it.

The problem doesn't come from benefiting from their research and

knowledge, the problem comes when people align themselves with one of them to the exclusion of the others and compete for who is the best. What is worse is when followers of one particular school look upon others as rivals and not really living the real Islam.

You are quite right that Muslims can become confused. And there is really no need. Islam is very simple. Islam asks people to declare that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. If we can take these things into our hearts and not just proclaim them with our lips, and if we can live what we proclaim, then Islam will speak with a very clear voice. There is an Arabic proverb which says, 'What comes from the lips reaches the ears, but what comes from the heart reaches the heart.' As Muslims we ought to take this proverb into our own

hearts and let others benefit from it. We shouldn't just tell others how they should behave, but we should show them.

Our beloved Prophet (peace be upon him) was the best of men ever to have lived. He was not only good and kind, wise and a great leader, but he was also full of fun with his friends, and very tender. There are so many occasions when we see the Prophet (pbuh) laughing and joking. It is said, for example, that he used to tell jokes to his wives every single day. There was the famous time, also, when he was interrupted at prayer by the young Hassan and Hussein. Rather than tell them to go away, he allowed them to play with him, and then he made up the prayer later. Is this the all-too serious Islam that many would have us believe in?

Muhammad (pbuh) was also quick to forgive others if it was right to do so. If

there was any slight to Islam, he would fight it with all his strength, but if the insult was a personal one he would most often overlook it. Do you know, in doing this he won so many hearts to Islam?

We need to distinguish what is from Islam and what are the cultural practices which people have come to observe in different parts of the world. I am sure that there are many Muslims who would agree with you that it is forbidden to watch comedy or to crack jokes, but they would find it very hard to show you where such an order comes from. It certainly doesn't come from Islam.

There is a very simple truth which Muslims should remember: Everything is permissible in Islam, except that which has been expressly forbidden. There are too many Muslims who are quick to tell you

that such and such is *haram*, but they have no basis in the holy *Qur'an* or the *Sunnah* of our Prophet (pbuh) for making such claims. The things in Islam which are actually forbidden to Muslims are very few. They include the eating of pork and the drinking of alcohol, for example, because Allah has declared that these things are harmful to us. Cracking jokes is not one of the *haram* things!

There are many nowadays who declare 'we will die for you Muhammad' yet what we need nowadays is for Muslims to live for him. The *Sunnah* of our beloved Prophet (pbuh) makes life easier, not more difficult. His example (peace be upon him) brings us closer to Allah and closer to other Muslims, not further from them. May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him.

The rules which we observe as Muslims

are there for our own good, to help us live the lives that Almighty Allah wants us to live. They are not just rules and regulations for the sake of it. Unfortunately, some of those who tell us how to behave in such a way and how not to behave in another, have missed the point of what is allowed and what is not in Islam.

Muslims should be the happiest of people. We should be recognized by others by the way we speak, by the way we act and by the cheerful and pleasant way we interact with others. There is no excuse whatever for Muslims to be miserable and none whatever for being loners. When Muslims are fasting in Ramadan, for example, no one should know that they feel hungry and thirsty. On the contrary, they should be even more cheerful than usual. Fasting with a long face is to miss the point completely. It is better not to

bother than to look so miserable during the days of fasting that everyone gets such a bad image of what it is to be Muslim.

I know a lot of Muslims who are very serious. I even know some who are miserable. But the vast number of Muslims I know are cheerful people who are trying their best to live good lives in the service of Allah and of their brothers and sisters. Just read the life of our Prophet (pbuh) to see how Muslims should really behave. Don't let the miserable ones spoil your understanding of what Islam is really like! We are all the more heroic in Ramadan when others see how much we love Allah and Islam that we fast happily for His sake and thank Him for the opportunity of doing so.

Questions about Ramadan

Question 1 Loura

How can I prepare for Ramadan ?

Asalaamu alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatu, sister. Thank you for your question.

When people get married they spend a lot of time beforehand preparing for the big event. When people start a new job or go

to a new college or university they spend time and effort preparing themselves before the first day.

In our lives as Muslims, Ramadan is very important and we should spend time also preparing for this great event in our lives. Reminding ourselves in the coming weeks that Ramadan will soon be upon is, in itself, one way of preparing.

We can prepare also by beginning to mull over in our minds what we hope to achieve this Ramadan. We need to be very sensible in setting ourselves achievable goals. It is no use someone setting himself the goal of reading the entire *Qur'an*, attending all *Tarawiyah* prayers and getting up in the last third of the night to pray, when he doesn't normally pray the required five times a day. Be realistic and be sensible.

We will achieve great things by taking things slowly. If all we achieve in Ramadan is to fast from dawn to sunset, then we will have achieved a very great thing and, *inshallah*, we will be rewarded for doing so.

We can prepare for Ramadan by fasting occasional days beforehand, especially if we think that the fast is going to be very difficult for us to do. We can prepare by beginning to recite the *Qur'an* if we are not accustomed to doing so. We can try to get up in the last third of the night if this is something we would hope to achieve in Ramadan.

Question 2 Samah

***Asalaamu Alaykum*, Brother Idris, *Ramadan Kareem*. Actually I have a problem every Ramadan. I am living in a western country and due to the work, I**

even take my *iftar* at work. No time left for praying or reciting *Qur'an.* Sometimes even I miss some prayers.

I am not happy coz of the load of work and the system of the life... Do you have any tips to enhance myself in Ramadan?

Asalaamu alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatu. Thank you for your question, and may Almighty Allah bless you this Ramadan.

We often forget, living in supposedly Muslim countries, how easy many of us have it in practising Islam and living as Muslims. Your question should prompt all such Muslims to thank Allah for His goodness in calling them to be Muslim and for giving them so many supports which they take for granted.

We forget that for many Muslims in the

world they might be the only Muslims in their town or may work in places where it is very difficult to practise as a Muslim.

In direct answer to your question, then, you must remember that Almighty Allah has called you to fast for His sake during Ramadan. No one can prevent you from doing this. You should try as best you can to observe the prayers diligently and on time, or at least make up for them if this is not possible.

Try to set yourself a special place and time when you can sit alone and read the *Qur'an*. It need not be for a great length of time, but it will make Ramadan different and special for you if you can do this. In fasting for Allah's sake, try to understand what the fast means. In giving up food and drink during daylight hours, remember the many blessings which Allah

gives you. Remember all those in the world who go without food regularly, simply because they have none. Ask Allah Almighty to make you a better Muslim and a better person.

If you can do any of these things you will be well on the way to making your Ramadan a great success, *inshallah.*

Question 3 Muslimah - Bahrain

***Salaam* brother. How did you find your first Ramadan?**

Asalaamu alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatu, sister. Thank you for your question.

Before telling you about my first Ramadan as a Muslim, I need to mention the Ramadan before I became a Muslim. I was teaching in a school in London and I

was not Muslim, but the good example of the pupils was one of the things which led me to Islam. I actually fasted with them and observed their prayers for the whole month.

When my first Ramadan as a Muslim came, I felt that I had already been well trained the year before! I was still teaching in the same school, so the pupils were a great support to me - and so were the headteacher and the teachers, who were not Muslim but who wanted to encourage me. When I look back now, I can see how lucky I was at that time to have the support of so many good people.

I think it's very important never to forget what Ramadan is all about. It is about coming closer to Allah by obeying His Will. If we keep this in mind, even if we have a headache through lack of water or

are a little irritable because we are hungry, our Ramadan will be worthwhile, *inshallah.*

My first Ramadan meant that I was still new to so many things and wanted to do things right. *Inshallah*, as Muslims we will always feel this way.

Question 4 Pauline - UK

***Asalaamu Alaykum*, brother. I am a new Muslim and this is my first Ramadan, *Alhamdulillah*. Everyone says it is a wonderful time, but to be honest I'm not sure if I'm looking forward to it because I work all week (Monday to Friday) and I can't help thinking how tired I'm going to be all month from getting up extra early to prepare food and eat before *Fajr*, and then to rush home to prepare food for *iftar* so I can pray afterwards. It hasn't even started**

yet and I'm already feeling tired at the thought of it, and this in turn makes me feel guilty! Do you have any advice on how to improve my attitude? I want it to be special as it's my first one. Thank you!

Asalaamu alaykum, sister. Thank you for your question.

I wouldn't listen too much to all those who tell you how great Ramadan is going to be. From the evidence of how many of them live their lives for the rest of the year, Ramadan doesn't really seem to have affected them very much!

I would suggest that you take things slowly and one day at a time. The one thing we are asked to do in Ramadan is to fast for the sake of Allah. Everything else is an added extra. If we can do these extra

things, all well and good. If we can't, we are not doing anything wrong.

If, at the end of a day of fasting, you need extra sleep, go to bed! Ramadan is not a punishment, but a chance to come closer to Allah. It is your special time to do as He commands you - don't listen to what others are telling you that you must do. In the Holy *Qur'an* we read:

﴿ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ كُتِبَ عَلَيۡكُمُ ٱلصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبۡلِكُمۡ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٨٣﴾ ﴾

[البقرة:183]

"Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may learn self-restraint."

2:183

As you prepare in these final days before Ramadan starts, set yourself achievable goals. Don't aim to get up in the last third of the night to pray if you know you won't be able to sustain it. You will only feel guilty when you fail. Don't resolve to read chapters of the *Qur'an* every night if it is going to be too much for you. Take things slowly.

Concentrate on the fast. Try to eat well before the day begins, and eat well again in the evening. You are in control of your fasting. Don't let events make you feel rushed. For example, you don't need to have everything prepared for when you arrive home. Nor do you need to have a lavish banquet every night. When the fast ends, take some dates and some milk, if this is possible, and then calm down for a while. Cook a meal later.

Enjoy Ramadan. May it be a time of strengthening you as a Muslim and drawing you closer to Allah. Don't let others control you or be taken in by reading about what Ramadan "should" be like. Think about those whose fast will not end each day with the Call to Prayer because they will die of hunger while we are feasting to the full. May Allah touch your heart and make us all better people.

Question 5 Rafael USA businessman

I converted to Islam only a few days ago. I accepted Islam after studying it for 5 years. I'm 62 years old and I'm a father of 3 beautiful daughters and I love my wife very much. They don't know that I'm a Muslim. Ramadan is coming so I have to explain this to them. I don't want to lose them, because I love them so much. How can I present Islam

to them in a way that won't affect our relationship?

Asalaamu alaykum. Congratulations and welcome. In accepting Islam, all the sins of your life were forgiven - all of them. That is a very beautiful condition in which to celebrate the holy month of Ramadan.

What makes you think that telling your family that you are Muslim will make you lose them? It is true that the world presents a very false image of what Islam is like. Here is your chance to tell the ones you love most in the world what the real message of Islam is.

Only you know how to open up the subject with them. Whether you call a family meeting and try to explain the journey which led you to Islam, or whether you tell them individually, only you can decide. Whether you tell all of them or

just one, is another matter for you. What you do need to emphasize to them, though, is that you have not gone mad, that you haven't been abducted by extremists and that you still love them as much as you always have done.

You might even like to print out this question and answer and use it as a basis to start. Give them a copy and let them see how fearful you are of their reaction

You must use loving words to show your love for them. Americans are big on hugging, aren't they, so this should be a time for lots of hugs!

Think over what you might say. Pray about it. Ask Almighty Allah to make clear the path. *Inshallah*, this Ramadan will be very special for you - and for your family. Who knows what the end results will be, except Allah Alone.

Question 6 Tarek

In the absence of a local Mufti, what is your advice for Muslims in Europe and North America concerning finding out when the first day of Ramadan should be to start the fast?

Jazakum Allahu Khairan* and *Ramadan Mubarak

Asalaamu alaykum, brother, and thank you for your question.

The most important thing to remember is that Muslims do not act alone in these matters. One man, for example, can't decide on his own to start fasting on one day, whilst another man decides to fast on another.

It is of course desirable that Muslims in a whole country or region should act in unity in such a case, but they are not obliged to do so. We should always try to avoid giving a bad example to those who are not Muslim and who would see Islam as somehow divided.

Groups of mosques most usually choose to be guided by their country's Muslim organisations. This is normally the case in Europe and North America, but it is not a binding rule and mosques cannot be made to do so.

If I might do so here, I would like to add a comment to the debate about moon-sighting or using astronomical calculations. It is a fact that science can tell us the precise times when the moon will be sighted for many years to come. As Muslims we are very comfortable with

what science has to teach us. However, as Muslims we also realise that nothing at all happens unless Allah wills it to be so.

We know, therefore, that the sun will come up tomorrow. We also know, though, that the sun will not come up tomorrow unless Allah wills it to be so. Looking for the new moon, then, is our way of admitting that even times and seasons are under the control of Allah and that we can never take things for granted. Submitting even our great intellect, which comes from Allah, to His will, is just one way we show ourselves to be Muslim.

Let us never be so clever that we forget that in all things we depend on the One who made the heavens and the earth and all that is in between them.

Question 7 Nabeel Ahmed - United Arab Emirates

Computer Engineer

I pray 4 times a day; it becomes difficult to get up in the morning so I pray *Fajr* in the afternoon; it happens so often that when ever I pray I cannot concentrate on my prayers. I start recollecting all bad things and just cannot concentrate. Please advise how can I concentrate in my prayers and my tasks related to my work.

Thanks and Regards.

Asalaamu alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatu. Thank you for your question. Although you don't relate it to Ramadan, prayer is so much at the heart of Ramadan that it is a very good question for us to answer.

First of all, we must remember that Islam is very sensible and practical. It is not rigid and uncompromising at all. Even though Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) thought at first that Muslims ought to pray many more times than five, Almighty Allah instructed His Messenger that Muslims would pray five times daily, giving a routine of prayer to our lives.

The first prayer is at the very start of the day. The second is at noon, the third in the afternoon, the fourth when the sun goes down and the last one just before we sleep.

"Catching up" prayers is possible if we occasionally miss one of the five. Catching up, though, is not the norm and we should not make it so. Doing that takes away from the meaning of the five prayers spread through the course of the day. Making a habit of fitting the five prayers when it

suits us is missing the whole idea. It turns a spiritual idea into a ritual, devoid of spirituality.

Fajr, then, is the dawn prayer. It should not be said in the afternoon. It is, in my opinion, the most beautiful of all the prayer times, because all is still and quiet.

What to do about missing *Fajr*? Here are three ideas:

- go to bed earlier, so as to be able to get up for *Fajr*.

- get an alarm clock, or even two or three.

- ask your friends to call you on the telephone to wake you or to call and go with you to the mosque. Failing that, ask your telephone company to give you a wake-up call.

Perhaps this Ramadan, your greatest challenge will be to pray each of the prayers on time.

All of us become distracted in prayer at one time or another. We are not angels, but men and women. Satan does his utmost to distract us and there is usually enough going on in our lives to give him ample opportunity.

It is important to prepare ourselves before praying. We can't expect to rush around busy and then automatically go into a religious mode at prayer time. The washing before prayer gives us the chance to calm down and prepare our hearts and minds for what we are about to do.

If you had an appointment with the President of France, you wouldn't just work in the office until just before the

meeting, would you? You would prepare for the meeting - a lot!

Try to think of prayer in this way. You will be meeting the Creator of the heavens and the earth - far more important than any human - so prepare for the meeting.

I wish you well for Ramadan. Start practicing now.

Question 8 Enrique - Italy

financial consultant

***Asalaamu alaykum*, brother. Thank you for this opportunity.**

I want to ask about how to deal with smoking in Ramadan. I've been smoking since I was 15 years old and now I'm 35 years old. I really do not think I could quit smoking, and I don't know if I could fast Ramadan without smoking all the day.

Please don't tell me to be patient because I don't think I will. Last year I could only fast 4 days because of smoking. Please help.

Asalaamu alaykum, brother. I will not lecture you on how wrong smoking is, or how we harm our bodies by taking smoke into them - but maybe I just did!

As far as smoking and fasting are concerned, Muslims are not given a choice. We are told that smoking is part of the fast from sunrise to sunset. There is no other answer I can give you.

(I used to smoke cigarettes from the age of sixteen to when I embraced Islam at the age of forty two. On becoming Muslim I just stopped. *Alhamdulillah*, I haven't smoked since.)

So, it seems you are in for some tough days! I don't have an easy answer or a quick solution. All I can suggest is that you beg Allah Almighty to help you one day at a time to be faithful to His command to fast from sunrise to sunset. If you fail one day, though, it doesn't mean the end of Ramadan for you. It just means you failed one day and you can make up for that failure when Ramadan is over. May He bless you and make this Ramadan special for you, *inshallah*.

Question 9 Kamal

Brother Idris, since I became a Muslim, I am trying my best to lower my gaze. Sometimes, it gets really difficult as I am living in the West, and you know what I mean. I am not sure what I am supposed to do in Ramadan? It is a daily struggle and I am not sure if I can remain not looking at women all day as I am fasting. Advise me.

Asalaamu alaykum, brother and thank you for your question and for your honesty.

Even though Islam is sent from Almighty Allah to help mankind, it is nontheless a very sensible religion. Allah knows well the stuff of which we are made. One of the very reasons for Ramadan is that He gives us this opportunity to control our unruly bodies and to prove to ourselves that they do not control us.

It is not wrong to look at others. People are created by Allah and all beauty comes from Him. Lowering the gaze is important to prevent the looking from leading us astray.

Almighty Allah created us as men and women, not as angels, and we have all the

passions, thoughts and feelings appropriate to men and women. In their proper context, these natural feelings will lead us to marry and have children.

It is important to remember, too, that looking is perfectly natural. Just as the ear hears things and our feet are used to walk, so our eyes look at things. This is neither good nor bad. It is just a fact.

The great gift to us of Ramadan helps us to realize that all of our perfectly natural instincts are put at the disposal of Allah, since we receive them all from Him. If our looking at others is leading us to do wrong things, then we need to get this under control - and Ramadan is the help we need to do this. Fasting helps us to know that we are in control of our bodies, not they over us.

Inshallah, the daily struggle we all have to make to become better people will help you, too, to become a better person and a better Muslim this Ramadan.

Question 10

***Asalaamu Alaykum wa rahmatullah*, brother. What are your tips for new Muslims who witness their first Ramadan this year?**

Asalaamu alaykum. All Muslims can learn from those who have only recently embraced Islam, so "new" Muslims have something to teach us all during Ramadan.

They teach us that Ramadan is about Allah. All else is unimportant. *Iftar* parties *sohoor* parties, television shows, sweets and lanterns are all unimportant compared to the fact of coming closer to Allah by fasting for His sake.

Those new to Islam should be realistic in the goals they set themselves, as should all Muslims. For example, if you do not normally pray the five daily prayers it is unrealistic to set yourself the goal of praying five times a day and then praying *Tarawiyah* prayers in the mosque and then getting up in the night to pray extra prayers. All of us should try to get the basics right first.

If giving up smoking seems such a daunting thing, take it slowly, one day at a time. Ramadan is a gift from Allah, so we should see it as such.

My own prayer is that all of us can benefit this Ramadan and that Almighty Allah will accept our prayers and our fasting and our good deeds for His sake, *inshallah.*

Ramadan Karim. Ramadan Mubarak.

Question 11 James - Japan

I am an American living in Japan for now. I have to go to business lunches with my Japanese partners and it will be offensive to them if I said "no," because I am fasting. I don't want to seem rude, so is there a way out?

Asalaamu alaykum and thank you for your question.

Unfortunately, there is no easy get-out clause for business lunches! In such a situation you will have to very calmly explain to your business partners that you can very happily attend the lunch with them, but you cannot eat with them because of the requirements of Ramadan.

If they are unprepared to accept your beliefs and the consequences of your beliefs, then there is not much more you

can do with them. Perhaps, though, the example you give will make them think a little about what has prompted your actions.

The important thing is to be very gracious and calm in explaining the reason you cannot eat at the lunch. *Inshallah*, your reasons will be acceptable to them.

Question 12

***Asalaamu alaykum*, dear brother, I just want to know what should I say to my non-Muslim friends when they see me not eating all day? I don't want to look weird or go in to a debate?**

Asalaamu alaykum. Thank you for your question.

There should be no need for a debate or an argument. You can quite simply say that

because you are Muslim you are fasting during the month of Ramadan. There is nothing weird about following one's religious beliefs and there is certainly no need to make up excuses or to tell lies about why you are not eating.

If your friends are indeed really your friends they will accept your right to fast as a Muslim, without trying to criticise or debate with you.

You never know, your example might be enough to make them think about Islam and what has prompted you to fast for Allah's sake.

Question 13

Shane

I am not a Muslim and I don't mean to intrude, but what is so special about this month that you need preparation for?

Thank you for your question. Those who are not Muslim could not possibly imagine the joy which Muslims feel when Ramadan comes. Children look forward to it all year round. Adults see Ramadan as a special chance which Allah gives them every year to renew their lives and to become better people.

For Muslims, Ramadan is the month of the Holy *Qur'an*. It is the month in which the *Qur'an* was first revealed to Muhammad (pbuh) and during Ramadan many Muslims try to attend the special evening prayers in which the entire *Qur'an* will be recited during the course of the month.

Ramadan is also the month of fasting for the sake of Allah, remembering all of those who have less than we have and being thankful for all the good things we receive from Allah during the year.

Muslims fast during Ramadan because Allah has commanded them to do so. There is a great feeling at the end of each day's fasting when we have fasted successfully for the sake of Allah.

Such a special month, then, requires us to be physically and mentally ready for it. It is a great chance we are being offered to become better Muslims and better people and it would be a shame to waste it by not being properly prepared. A national football team trains well before the World Cup, doesn't it? Well, Muslims see Ramadan as far more important than the World Cup!

I hope that this answers your question.

Question 14 Bebe

Asalaamu alaikum. **Why is Ramadan so special?**

Asalaamu alaykum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatu. Thank you for your question.

Those who are not Muslim could not possibly understand the beauty of this holy month. Non-Muslims only see the external fact of fasting, but there is so much more to Ramadan than this. It is right that we fast because Allah commands us to do so. In responding to His will, we benefit in so many ways.

For Muslims, Ramadan is the month of prayer, when they try to increase the prayers they say and become more and more faithful to what Allah wants.

Ramadan is also the special month of the holy *Qur'an*, since it was in Ramadan that the first verses of the holy book were first revealed to prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). During Ramadan, Muslims try

to recite more of the *Qur'an* and to study its meaning for their lives.

Ramadan is also a time when we think of those who are less fortunate than ourselves. At the end of each day of fasting we will eat a meal, but there are many in the world whose fast will not end with the sunset prayer, since they will die of hunger. Our own fast helps us to think of others and to give thanks for all the blessings we take for granted.

Put quite simply, Ramadan is a chance for each one of us to start over again and to become better people, better Muslims. How wonderful Islam is, that we get this chance every year.

Final words:
Fasting with a smile

﴿ وَكَذَٰلِكَ جَعَلْنَٰكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِّتَكُونُوا۟ شُهَدَآءَ عَلَى ٱلنَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ ٱلرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا ﴾

[البقرة:143]

Thus We have made of you an Umma justly balanced. That ye might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves.

2:143

Mahmoud, 19, and his brother Mustapha, 16, told me that they only pray when they go to the mosque on a Friday. We were talking on the tram in

Alexandria (yes, the same one where we met the men in handcuffs) about Islam and the two teenage boys were pleased to have such a conversation. I could see that they were a bit surprised, though, that an Englishman should be asking them if they pray! However, the younger brother was quick to point out that during Ramadan they would be praying all the prayers, as well as fasting and reciting the *Qur'an*. There was no doubt in his mind that this is what they would both be doing.

Another Mustapha, also 19, told me how much he was looking forward to the coming of Ramadan. In almost the same breath as he described how his family prayed and fasted together, he also told me how he would be taking part in a soccer tournament lasting the whole month.

Mustapha described what his Ramadan routine would be. He would get up during the last third of the night to go out into the street to eat *Sohoor* (the pre-fast meal) with his friends and then they would all go together to pray *Fajr* in the mosque. After this he would go home and recite the holy *Qur'an* for about an hour, before going on with the business of the day. At noon and again in the afternoon he would go back to pray in the mosque and recite more from the *Qur'an*. When the *Adhan* will finally sound to signal the end of the day's fasting, he said, he would take his *iftar* meal with his family, after they had all prayed together in their home. This extended meal would take them through to the last of the five daily prayers, which he would pray once more in the mosque, followed by *Tarawiyah* prayers. And

when all that was done, he said, he would head out into the street once more to play football in the Ramadan tournament!

What a splendid description of Islam, coming not from a sheikh but from an ordinary teenage boy! What a perfect summary of how Islam makes holy all aspects of life. If only people could see that this is what Islam and Muslims are really like.

In conclusion to this book, then, we sum up what we have said about Islam's holy month. In these final words we highlight the main points and try to point out the main areas which make Ramadan so special to Muslims. Perhaps during the holy month of Ramadan, as well as your fasting, your prayers and your recitation of the holy *Qur'an*, you

might like to use this conclusion to the book as a kind of checklist for how you are doing.

Remember, it is Allah who commands you to fast for His sake. Whatever others may tell you, this is the fundamental thing. There is, however, no promise that you will feel good. There is no assurance that you will soar to great heights of spirituality. You are simply asked to fast. *Inshallah*, Allah will reward you for this.

And if on one of the days of Ramadan you fail in your fasting, that is not a reason to give up altogether and abandon all your efforts. You are not perfect. Welcome to the human race and carry on with your fasting and your good works and think about how you will make up for this lapse

when Ramadan is over. For now, savour the moment which Allah has given you.

For the Muslim, Ramadan is a time to set things right once more, to sort out the priorities in one's life. It is a time to make a new start and to take one's religion seriously again, to be faithful to prayers, to recite the *Qur'an*, to give thanks at all times to Allah for His goodness. Ramadan gives us all the chance to start all over again and to forget the mistakes of the past. It is a time to Spring Clean one's spiritual house and invite Allah into every room in that house.

When each day's fast is over there is a sense of joy and happiness. It is a time when Muslims share what they have achieved during the day. They are Muslims and they have fasted for

Allah's sake. At the end of each day's fast everyone will be waiting for the *muezzin* to announce that it is time to break the fast. Radios will be turned on in anticipation of the Call to Prayer. Throats thirsting for water will eagerly await the cry of "*Allahu Akbar*" to end the day's fast.

From Cairo's great Citadel, for example, a cannon will announce that the day's fast is over.

And yet, let us remember something very important. For many in the world, the sound of a cannon will not signal the end of their thirst, nor will the Call to Prayer give them an opportunity for food.

Let us not forget that in Ramadan, as we rejoice and celebrate the end of each day, there will be many in the

world who will starve to death because they have no food.

As we learn once more about the countless blessings that Allah showers upon us in Ramadan, let us not forget our brothers and sisters without food or drink. Let us be grateful every day - not only in Ramadan - for the good things of this life. We take many things for granted, like food and drink, like the love of our wives and children. Let us, this year, allow Ramadan to make us better people, more grateful for what we have.

In conclusion, then, the joy that millions feel as Ramadan comes upon them once more is difficult to put into words. Those who are not Muslim cannot imagine what Ramadan is really like. It must seem like a severe

diet that lasts for a month. How, they say, can people look forward to going without food and drink between dawn and sunset for a whole month? And yet, that is what Muslims have done. They have looked forward all year to this one special month in the calendar, knowing that their fast will be total. They have prepared themselves for the fast, and now Ramadan is upon them they enter into it with their whole mind and body.

The reason for it is simple: They have been commanded by Allah to do so.

﴿ يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ كُتِبَ عَلَيۡكُمُ ٱلصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبۡلِكُمۡ لَعَلَّكُمۡ تَتَّقُونَ ١٨٣ ﴾

[البقرة:183]

O ye who believe. Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed to those before you. That ye may (learn) self-restraint.

2:183

The fast is done for the sake of Allah alone. The joy that the fast brings cannot be described. The reward, *inshallah*, of the true and sincere fast during Ramadan is clear - Heaven itself.

Ask About Islam

In this fourth book in the **Ask About Islam** series, Idris Tawfiq talks about the importance of Ramadan in the lives of Muslims. Ramadan, he says, is a chance to reconnect with Allah. It is the month of prayer. It is the month of the holy Qur'an and the month of remembering those who are less fortunate than we are More important than anything, though, Muslims fast during the holy month because Allah has commanded them to do so

British Muslim writer and presenter, Idris Tawfiq, has a degree in English Language and Literature from the University of Manchester and a degree in Sacred Theology from the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas in Rome. For many years he was Head of Religious Education in different schools in the UK. More remarkably, before embracing Islam he was a Roman Catholic priest. This rich experience in dealing with people and explaining matters of faith to them enlivens his writing and his talks, making them simple and easy to understand

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